

# VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



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## WELCOME

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The Maryland Park Service welcomes you to our robust, active, and inclusive volunteer program. Volunteers are a critical part of the operation and management of Maryland's vast park system.

The [Maryland Park Service](#) of the [Department of Natural Resources](#) is responsible for the maintenance of our State Park system, which covers 75 parks located on over 140,000 acres throughout the State. The system includes 53 general State Parks covering 97,195 acres, 25 Natural Resource Management Areas across 27,581 acres, 7 Natural Environment Areas totaling 12,614 acres, 3 Rail Trails ranging over 897 acres, and 2 State Battlefields covering 2,474 acres.

Individual parks manage the Volunteer Program for a specific area, though some parks are in groups called park complexes. Each park or complex has a designated Volunteer Coordinator to prioritize projects and assignments based on the needs of the park. Many parks and complexes work with other agencies, including some non-profit organizations such as a "Friends Of" group, or local businesses. These organizations work collaboratively with the parks to better serve the mission of the Maryland Park Service.

Volunteers are a key component to the function of State Parks and may perform a variety of services critical to the protection of our public lands. Since the first Maryland State Park was created in 1907, volunteers have served as an integral part of the Maryland Park Service and the surrounding communities.

Thank you for choosing to volunteer for this rewarding experience. The Maryland Park Service deeply values your contributions to the park system

Nita Settina  
Superintendent

*"The mission of the Maryland Park Service is to manage the natural, cultural, historical and recreational resources to provide for wise stewardship and enjoyment by people."*

## **VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR CONTACT INFORMATION**

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Each park's Volunteer Coordinator and their contact information can be found at <https://dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/pages/volcoords.aspx>

You can support the Maryland Park Service by joining the statewide volunteer group. On a local level, many parks have "Friends Of" groups that are accessible from each facility's volunteer page or the website below.

<https://dnr.maryland.gov/Publiclands/Pages/friendsof.aspx>

## **TYPES OF VOLUNTEERISM**

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A wide variety of volunteer opportunities exist within the Maryland Park Service. To learn more about the different volunteer opportunities at a specific park, contact the park Volunteer Coordinator.

### **Youth Volunteer Opportunities:**

Worthwhile projects and programs are available to get the next generation involved and interested in park stewardship. Volunteers under age 18 need consent and supervision from a parent or guardian. For more information, visit the individual park volunteer page or contact the Volunteer Coordinator. Scout troops, Eagle Scouts, and Gold Award recipients can contribute to their community by making a difference at their local Maryland State Park. Previous youth projects have included removing invasive plant species, rehabilitating brick walkways, planting trees, upgrading trails, and building bulletin boards. Prospective Eagle Scouts need to contact the park at least one year before their 18th birthday and Gold Award recipients need to contact the park at least one year before the recipient's high school graduation. Student Service-Learning (SSL) hours may be approved by the Volunteer Coordinator but please check in advance to confirm eligibility.

### **Public Volunteer Events:**

Parks may post public volunteer events (no pre-registration required) on a park-to-park basis. Please contact the appropriate Volunteer Coordinator to find out ways to get involved with the park's signature events.

### **Corporate Group/Community Organization/Partnership Volunteer Opportunities:**

Volunteer opportunities provide great team- building experiences for corporate groups, community organizations, and partnerships. Groups can help with trail maintenance, landscaping, painting projects, or other meaningful projects. For more information, visit the individual park volunteer page.

### **Internships:**

Internships are a great way to gain practical experience and skills, apply classroom learning, explore career opportunities, and establish connections to build a network of professional contacts. Internships can be arranged based on park staffing and needs.

For more information, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator at the park in which you are interested.

**Individuals and families:**

Individuals and families may enroll in various opportunities made available at each park. Open opportunities are listed at <https://ec.samaritan.com/custom/1528/#searchSection> under the “Opportunities” tab. For more information, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator at the park in which you are interested.

**Volunteer Naturalist/Interpreter:**

Becoming a Volunteer Naturalist or Volunteer Interpreter is an opportunity to share knowledge, experience, and insight about a specific area or park. This can be natural (plants, wildlife), historical, or recreational (Healthy Parks Healthy People, water recreation) in either formal or informal programming and outreach.

**Volunteer Ranger, Volunteer Mounted Patrol, or Volunteer Bike Patrol:**

The Volunteer Ranger (VR), Volunteer Mounted Patrol (VMP), and Volunteer Bike Patrol (VBP) Programs are designed for volunteers ages 18 and above who want to assist the Department's regular work force in State Parks with operations, programs, and public service. Volunteers are trained and provided with uniforms for their jobs once they have completed 40 hours of volunteer service at a State Park. Volunteers with their own horses or bicycles who can complete the appropriate training and assessments are eligible to become members of the VMP or VBP with park approval.

**Camp Hosts:**

Camp Hosts work a stipulated number of hours a week in return for a free campsite while they are hosting. The work to be done is generally campground related and includes welcoming new campers and answering questions, keeping the campground and bathhouses in good condition, and sometimes assisting with general park operations. Generally, the Camp Host is required to be on site on weekends (Friday-Sunday and holidays when the campground is busiest). Camp Hosts are asked to make a commitment for the length of their stay.

## **VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS**

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*All Volunteers*

- Must be at least 18 years old to volunteer without adult supervision
- Must register and record volunteer hours using the [MPS Volunteer website](#)
- Must follow all applicable State/DNR/MPS/park-specific policies, including nondiscrimination policy
- Must be able to perform required duties with minimal staff supervision
- Must complete and pass all required training as determined by individual parks

**\*\*Any volunteer must complete at least 40 hours of training within the park prior to achieving the title of Volunteer Ranger, VMP, or VBP.\*\***

### *VR/VMP/VBP*

- Must be at least 18 years old
- Must complete 40 hours of volunteer time in a specific park before receiving title/uniform
- Must have a criminal background check completed
- Driving record will be checked when applicable
- Should be able to volunteer on weekends and holidays
- Must be able to perform required duties
- Must be able to pass assessments and evaluations as needed (i.e. horse/rider assessment for VMP)

### *Camp Host*

- Minimum age: 18
- Must have a criminal background check completed
- Driving record will be checked when applicable
- Must be able to perform required duties
- Should be able to volunteer on weekends and holidays

## **TRAINING**

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As representatives of the State of Maryland, volunteers must attend the training sessions listed below when required by the individual park. These sessions are available in a self-paced format. Requests for access to training should be submitted by Volunteer Coordinators.

- Bloodborne Pathogen Policy and Procedures
- Driver of Maryland State Vehicles (if applicable to work being performed)
- Portable Fire Extinguisher Safety
- Global Harmonization System (GHS)

It is recommended that Volunteer Coordinators develop a park- and work-specific orientation for new volunteers. This training can include, but is not limited to:

- Park-specific on-the-job (operating procedures, rules and regulations, safety, OSHA, etc.)
- Leave No Trace
- Scales & Tales (if applicable)
- Seasonal Interpretive Training (make requests to Ranger Melissa Acuti)

The MPS Training Division may offer training upon request depending on the number of students and staff availability for the classes listed below:

- Traffic Direction
- Sexual Harassment Prevention

In addition to the courses listed above, Volunteer Coordinators who manage Volunteer Rangers, VMP, VBP, or Camp Hosts should consider the training listed below. Check the [MPS Training Calendar](#) for class availability after receiving Park Manager approval:

- First Aid/CPR
- Annual Volunteer Training (includes Customer Service and Voluntary Compliance on a regularly rotating schedule) – after meeting 40 hour requirement of park-specific volunteer service
- Basic Chainsaw (First Aid/CPR is a mandatory prerequisite)

## **UNIFORM POLICY**

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Uniforms or volunteer attire should be professional, well-kept, and appropriate for the work. Volunteers should review and conform to the MPS Uniform Policy 21-09.

Base level volunteers: The individual park will provide guidance on attire.

### **Volunteer Ranger/VMP/VBP:**

The park Volunteer Coordinator should order appropriate parts using the [MPS Employee uniform order form](#). The volunteer's name and type of volunteer (Volunteer Ranger/VMP/VBP) should be clearly identified on the order form. The initial uniform for a new Volunteer Ranger/VMP/VBP will include one Volunteer Ranger cap, one long sleeve and one short sleeve military style shirt with MPS patch and Volunteer Ranger rocker, one pair of green cargo pants, and one belt. Further uniform parts should be purchased by the Volunteer Ranger or the host park.

### **Camp Host:**

The park Camp Host Coordinator should order appropriate uniform parts based on the park-specific designated Camp Host attire.

## **REPORTING HOURS**

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Volunteers should track hours individually in the [online volunteer database](#) using the [volunteer reporting Job Aid](#). Volunteer Coordinators will report the total number of volunteer hours annually to the designated MPS Headquarters representative.

## **AWARDS AND RECOGNITION**

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Volunteers are an asset to park operations in all capacities. Individuals who meet or exceed 100 hours of volunteering the previous calendar year earn an annual park pass. This pass is valid for one year from the date of issuance for volunteers who have fulfilled their 100-hour commitment during the course of the calendar year. The park Volunteer Coordinator will distribute these passes.

Awards in the Maryland Park Service Awards Program Policy are available to Volunteer

Rangers, Volunteer Mounted Patrol, and Volunteer Bike Patrol members (Letters of Commendation, Valor Awards, Honorary Ranger, and the Superintendent's Commendation).

Statewide volunteer appreciation events may be planned during the year. These may include picnics, camping, and other volunteer activities. Project or Volunteer group awards may vary. Park-specific assignments and incentives may vary.

## **EVALUATIONS**

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If through the course of their activities, it is found that any volunteer is either unable or unwilling to perform duties in an acceptable manner, termination from the program is acceptable. Some examples of improper work-related performance that can result in immediate dismissal of the volunteer are:

- Theft of property or funds
- Negligent operation of equipment or vehicles
- Alcohol or illegal drug use on the job
- Sexual harassment
- Serious traffic violations
- Serious criminal violations

Volunteer Coordinators complete and distribute a Volunteer Ranger, Volunteer Mounted Patrol, Volunteer Bike Patrol, or Camp Host evaluation form on a regular basis. The same form should also be used for long-term volunteers.

## **SAFETY AND PROTECTION**

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Safety is an agency priority. When performing work within a Maryland State Park, volunteers must:

- Be aware that safety is your personal responsibility.
- Identify any hazards associated with the work and determine how best to avoid them.
- Be always attentive to work surroundings. Remain alert and awake on the job.
- Follow correct procedures for the job. Obey all safety signs, labels, and other warnings.
- Use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when applicable to the assignment or duty. The park will provide PPE or volunteers may use their own if it meets the required standards for protection.
- Use the correct tools and equipment for the job. Use them in a correct and safe manner, and with adequate instructional training prior to use.
- Address any questions regarding hazards, procedures, PPE, etc. to the Volunteer Coordinator or the appropriate employee overseeing the work.
- Report any accidents or injuries to the Volunteer Coordinator.

Furthermore, volunteers must NEVER:

- Perform any unsafe practices regardless of the reason (e.g. running out of time, lack of correct tools or equipment, told to do so, etc.)
- Take shortcuts that increase risk.
- Bypass, remove, or modify safety features on tools or equipment.
- Attempt work that is beyond your ability to perform safely

All volunteers registered with the Maryland Park Service are unpaid persons providing services to and for the State of Maryland, therefore they are defined as "state personnel" under Md. Code Ann. State Govt. § 12-101(a) (3) for purposes of the Maryland Tort Claims Act.

A volunteer worker for a unit of State government is a covered employee under the Maryland Workers' Compensation Act. Md. Code Ann., Lab. & Empl. § 9-231.1. For purposes of the Workers' Compensation Act, the State is deemed the employer of the voluntary worker. The Act limits the benefits provided to a volunteer worker to medical services and treatment as described in Md. Code Ann., Lab. & Empl. § 9-660 et seq. (Subtitle 6, Part IX) for a compensable injury. Workers' Compensation claim forms must be submitted to the appropriate Maryland Park Service Headquarters staff contact within 72 hours after the accident/injury.

## **TERMINATION OF VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT**

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Volunteers may terminate the volunteer activity at any time and for any reason. Volunteers may be terminated at any time for any reason based on the park individual needs and resources. If termination is a result of conduct or performance issues, a letter with details of the situation will be created by a park staff member.

## **PARK POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

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There are a number of critical statewide park policies and procedures that address issues such as pets, firewood, drones, metal detecting, hunting, photography, and electric bicycles. These policies and procedures are posted and periodically updated at: <https://dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/Statewide-Maryland-Park-Policies.aspx>

### **Nondiscrimination Policy**

Pursuant to State Government Article, §20-304, Annotated Code of Maryland, it is unlawful for an owner or operator of a place of public accommodation or an agent/employee of the owner or operator to refuse, withhold from, or deny to anyone the accommodations, advantages, facilities and privileges of a place of public accommodation because of race, sex, age, color, creed, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.

## **News Media Policies**

Volunteers should not answer media requests or comments without prior approval from the DNR Office of Communications (OCM).

## **ENHANCING THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE**

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### **Know the Park**

Volunteers are encouraged to explore the park, the website, and maps to learn the most frequently asked questions. Maps/FAQ sheets/additional resources may be provided by each park Volunteer Coordinator. It is critical to become familiar with the rules of each park when serving as a Volunteer Ranger/VMP/VBP/Camp Host.

### **History of the Maryland Park Service**

The Maryland Park Service operates one of America's oldest state park systems. The first state- park land was set aside in 1907 when Catonsville philanthropist John Mark Glenn donated 43 acres of his Catonsville estate to the Maryland Board of Forestry. Thanks to this early start, today most Maryland residents live within 15 miles of a state park.

For much of the 20th-century, Maryland's parks were managed together with the state's forest system—also one of the nation's oldest. The earliest parks, most notably Patapsco Valley and Fort Frederick, were originally called “forest reserves.” Early on, however, Maryland's first State [Forester Fred W. Besley](#) recognized that some forests were more than places to save trees. [Patapsco's](#) proximity to Baltimore City made it an ideal place to create a new “city park.” Fort Frederick, purchased in 1922, saved the ruins of an important French and Indian War fortification. In fact, nearly all the land the Board of Forestry acquired between 1912 and 1922 was geared towards fostering outdoor recreation and historic preservation.

Like many states, however, Maryland's park system began to come of age during the 1930s' Great Depression. Thanks to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, federal money and labor poured into Maryland, and the first truly modern state parks were built. Much of the work was done by young men serving in the [Civilian Conservation Corps \(CCC\)](#). As part of a larger effort to get the nation's unemployed back to work, the CCC cleared trails, built roads, bridges, shelters and lakes. They rebuilt walls at Fort Frederick, reconstructed the first completed Washington Monument on South Mountain, and built shelters and roads in Patapsco. They also built new parks from the ground-up, including Elk Neck, Gambrill, Millburn Landing (now part of Pocomoke River), Herrington Manor and New Germany. Most of Maryland's state parks were created between 1945 and 1975. Thanks to a prosperous economy and assistance from the federal government, the State Department of Forests and Parks acquired and developed dozens of new parks, including Assateague, Cunningham

Falls, Deep Creek Lake, Gathland, Greenbrier, Gunpowder Falls, Janes Island, Martinak, Point Lookout, Rocks, Rocky Gap, Seneca Creek, Susquehanna, Tuckahoe, and many others. Most of these parks protected significant watersheds and natural wonders and saved significant historic sites. Park development was a priority in the 1960s, and many parks saw the creation of picnic areas, beaches, full-service campgrounds, and marinas. These developed parks are still among the most popular and heavily visited today, and remain the backbone of lands managed by the Maryland Park Service.

Beginning in the 1970s, park development slowed. Once abundant funding began to dry-up. More importantly, new types of park visitors began to appear. While many people still valued beaches, picnic areas and campgrounds, others looked for places to exercise and find spiritual enlightenment. In response to these changes, many parks began placing more emphasis on building and maintaining trails. In the 1980s and 1990s, new and innovative parks emerged, such as rail trails and water trails. One of the nation's first rail trails, the Northern Central (now Torrey C. Brown) Rail Trail, opened in 1984.

While park development slowed, thanks to Program Open Space, the parks themselves continued to grow. Many lands, such as Soldiers Delight and North Point, were acquired because of their unique, rare and valuable ecosystems. As a result, Maryland's state parks, along with its forests and wildlife management areas, are now widely viewed as places that are protected from development, providing a place where wildlife can prosper.

### **History of the Volunteer Program**

Generations of volunteers have helped to operate, preserve, and maintain the State Park system. The Volunteer Ranger Program started in 1992, comprised of dedicated volunteers committed to the mission of the Maryland Park Service and to teaching citizens about natural resources protection, assisting with activities, maintenance, and events at state forests and parks.

In 1997, a special category was established at Gunpowder Falls State Park that included Volunteer Rangers that performed their duties on horseback. This group of volunteers is known as the Volunteer Mounted Patrol (VMP). It was supported at that time by the non-profit organization "Volunteer Mounted Patrol, Inc."

In 1997, a special category was established at Patapsco Valley State Park that included Volunteer Rangers that performed their duties on bicycles. This group of volunteers was known as the Volunteer Bike Patrol (VBP). It was supported by the bike organizations of MAMBO, MORE, and IMBA. Both the equestrians and the bicyclists were able to utilize their expertise and training to assist other forest and park users, expose their sport to others, and help educate all users about the wise use of Maryland's natural resources.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT STATEMENT  
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR DRIVERS OF STATE VEHICLES TO:  
ALL DRIVERS OF STATE VEHICLES**

Drivers are required to read the Policies and Procedures for Drivers of State Vehicles and sign this Acknowledgement Statement at the bottom of the page. The signed statement must be retained by the Agency Fleet Manager.

Only drivers who have signed this Acknowledgement Statement may operate state vehicles.

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The undersigned certifies he/she has read the Policies and Procedures for Drivers of State Vehicles.

I am aware that a violation of these rules would be cause for disciplinary action.

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

AGENCY: \_\_\_\_\_

CLASSIFICATION: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

(Please print or type all information)